

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. RICHARD'S

By Dora Harvey

Formerly of St. Richard of Chichester, Norgate

The story of St. Richard's really has its beginnings in June of 1949, when the Rev. Charles Bishop of St. John, North Vancouver wrote an open letter to "all who are interested in Christ and his Church in this district," inviting all to a meeting for "the purpose of taking steps for Sunday School work and building a parish hall". In no time a committee was formed, and the Diocese of New Westminster was asked to purchase lots on the corner of Philip and 15th Street. With the backing of St. John's, the Diocese loaned \$250 for the lots and a further loan of \$800 for a frame structure to be built. With generosity and enthusiasm from St. John's, St. Catherine's, many local businesses and the residents themselves, the hall was built and a Service of Dedication held in March, 1951 by Bishop Godfrey Gower. Sunday School for around 200 children was now a reality.

For parents, however, the reality of their Sunday church was the long trek from Norgate up to St. John's, and few people had cars. So by 1953, serious planning for their own church had moved into high gear: in 1954 the parish hall was moved to its present site east of the church and ground was broken for the new church.

Meanwhile, several names had been considered for this new church and eventually St.

Richard was chosen. Contact was actually made with St. Richard's own cathedral in Chichester and the Cathedral Dean responded graciously, sending a fragment of stone from the cathedral to be embedded in the altar of St. Richard's of North Vancouver.

Enthusiasm and energy went on unchecked; individual donations contributed to the furnishings, the altar, font, hanging cross, front doors; countless hours of hard work painting, sanding, climbing ladders, washing windows. And finally, the building was ready: St. Richard's Church here in Norgate was dedicated by Bishop Gower in February, 1955.

Then began a very busy time in the life of this church: a young people's group formed, brownies, guides, cubs, scouts, ACW., festive celebrations, children as Servers, and much more. Sunday services at 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. were led by Rev. Ed Wilkins, assistant priest of St. John's until in 1957 the Rev. Theron Buchanan arrived with his family as the first full-time rector. A rectory was purchased in the Spring of 1959, and the parish was incorporated in 1964.

Following Mr. Buchanan was Fr. Mitchell, originally from Jamaica who arrived in 1962 and after his sudden death in 1968, the Rev. Ron Wickens and his family arrived. Both these priests are remembered still with deep affection.

Throughout the late 50's and 60's God's work continued through children's education, worship and growth of music; and the parish thrived. It was St. Richard's heyday.

The winds of social change, however, began sweeping everywhere in the 1970's and here in North Vancouver new recreation centres soon affected Sunday church attendance. With declining numbers at St. Richard's, finances became difficult and there followed a period of half-time, shared clerical ministry - first with St. Catherine's, then St. Simon's. It was around this time that a Memorial Garden was established.

Rev. Virginia Briant was appointed in 1981; Virginia was one of those first six women ordained to the priesthood in the Anglican Church of Canada and St. Richard's was her first parish.

Her newly-formed healing ministry attracted many new members and the parish was soon able to employ her full-time. Busy times were back, focused mainly on the healing ministry.

Exterior and interior improvements were undertaken to the building. By now, the parish hall was being rented to a pre-school operation. A car accident forced Virginia's early retirement In 1991, and a series of half-time ministries followed, led in turn by the Rev. Bert Willis, Rev. Kay Schmitt, Rev. Eve Wiseman, and the Rev. Wendy Eyre-Gray.

Attendance continued to decline in the following years, despite earnest campaigns and eventually the parish was able only to afford Sunday Supply clergy.

Then, in 2004, the Rev. Walter Bayley, already retired, offered his services and joined the

closure. It was accepted that St. Richard's had completed its Life Cycle. As in its beginnings, so at its ending St. Richard's has been buoyed and encouraged by the support of the deanery sister churches. And there IS hope for a future - hope that St. Richard's will be born to new life, within the deanery, in some form not yet known to us, as the deanery itself begins perhaps re-shaping its own future. "Let us hear what the spirit might be saying to the church".